

Hello! Thank you for allowing me to speak about a cause that's near and dear to my heart.

My name is Brad Race. I am proud to say I am a Support Service Provider or Co-Navigator for the DeafBlind. A Support Service Provider, or SSP, is a trained professional who assists works with DeafBlind individuals by providing environmental and visual information, mobility guidance, transportation and communication support. SSPs are trained and skilled in the communication mode and the needs of each DeafBlind individual. There is a wide variety of communication modes among the DeafBlind—these include spoken English, American Sign Language, close vision sign language, tactile signing, and something called ProTactile sign language. You may see some of these communication modes here today.

Using these specific communication modes, SSPs provide information, empowering the DeafBlind to make informed decisions. SSPs do not make decisions for the Deafblind. It is a “with and not for” service model which facilitates independence and access for the DeafBlind. Once more,

In Ohio alone, there are more than 80 thousand DeafBlind individuals. The DeafBlind are the most isolated and underserved population. Without continued state funding, services for the DeafBlind will end on June 30th, 2025.

Without continued funding, the DeafBlind will no longer have access to SSPs to accomplish every-day tasks and activities that you and I take for granted.

- * Won't be able to ascertain environmental/social surroundings,
- * Won't be able to identify and interact with people,
- * Won't be able to do basic tasks such as clothing and grocery shopping, reading mail, paying bills, banking, scheduling Dr visits,
- * Won't be able to make informed, autonomous choices,
- * Won't be able to attend religious and social activities,
- * Won't be able to complete forms for services,
- * Won't be able to know danger and safety issues

What I stated above isn't the worst of it. The DeafBlind will continue to struggle to communicate and navigate the world without their 2 key senses. The impact of losing

access to the SSP's/CN will have a drastic psychological impact. Art is a DeafBlind client who has shared about life without SSP services. Art's high school friend was a POW in the Vietnam war. His friend said that being a POW wasn't the worst of it. At one point, the friend was placed in solitary confinement. He says that COMPLETE ISOLATION led to a rapid decline in his mental and physical health. Unfortunately, Art knows that feeling of isolation and confinement—not being able to interact with and communicate with others and not being able to get out and do things for himself. Without SSP services, Art is completely isolated and confined.

The DeafBlind need you! I implore all of the Ohio Legislators: please do not leave the DeafBlind isolated. Please support the continued funding of the DeafBlind Fund. Say YES and PASS House Bill 96 with the DeafBlind Fund Amendment, GRF 415515 line item.